

## Merleau Ponty and the Body as the Medium of the Field

By Rudolph Bauer, Phd   *Fri, Sep 28, 2012*

Rudolph Bauer, Ph.D., Author

I have elaborated the nature of awareness as openness and as spaciousness. I have also described the nature of awareness as radiance, as lucidity radiating. I have also described the nature of awareness as pervasive knowingness. I have also described the actuality, facticity and resonance as the manifestations of awareness, the primordial field. I have also discussed the diaphanous character of the appearance of the world as well as the diaphanous character of the apparitional dimension, the archetypal realm of the gods and goddesses. I have also suggested not to confuse receptivity with passivity. I have also spoken about the *Field Quality* of awareness, the Tibetan word *dbying*.

The foundational site of this excitation of awareness (*rigpa*) is the body. This pristine awareness is manifestation of the field as universe of singular individuals within forms of embodiment. From the perspective of experience, our body embodies many meanings. When this experience of embodiment is located in representational thinking with its system of concepts and mental constructs and associated affective states we tend to take the content as reality and our body becomes an object rather than the medium of the field. There is objectification and reification of the field.

The body is the medium of the field rather than simply an object within the field. The body is a multi-dimensional medium, a dimension of awareness manifesting as flesh. The body is the medium or the vehicle of awareness. The experiential body has many forms. The body as light or as luminosity is the body of awareness, the *vajra vase* body. This is not the body of the mind. When the mind dominates the body, the containment of the mind is limiting and the person is bound by the containment of the mind. The person is in mind alone. What does this mean? Most people are contained in the body of the mind. The mind encapsulates the body, and even a particular function of the mind such as thinking or feeling or sensation or memory or fantasy can encapsulate the person.

One can be in the body of thinking (which is not the same as the body of thought, non-conceptual thought). You can have the body of affects and even a body of a specific affect like the body of rage. You can have the body of memory and this body can be organized by the melancholia of absence. You can have the body of fantasy which is the body of magical thinking. This body is often the psychosomatic body. You can have the body of imagination which is easily expanded in to the depth and breath of experience and poetic language.

You can have the body of mental intention, mentalistic in thinking, thinking, and more thinking and in doubting, doubting and still more doubting of your self and otherness. You can have the body of embodied intention, the felt intention of the field in its multi-dimensionality. This body is radically different than mentalistic intentionality, mentalistic is captured within the thinking function and is the realm of the dead. This realm is a kind of Hades of Greek antiquity. Aimless and bodiless, a realm of fragmentation, brokenness, parts breaking into parts with endless blaming of circumstances. This is the hungry ghost realm of the 6 realms of existence. It is nihilistic and the realm of deadness.

You can have the body of sensation with its concrete operationalness and density. The body can be shaped by the developmental stages of the mind; the empty body which is the body of lack and passivity which is the paranoid schizoid body. The empathetic body is the body of affective enmeshment. Feeling what others feel within one's own sphere, internalizing the experience of others as one's own. There is the body of autistic solipsism, the body of locked-in-ness. There is the body of pain at times pervasive and at times sporadic, always unpredictable. There is the body of bliss, maha sukha, the bliss of the beingness of *Being*.

Everyone can enter the body of awareness which is the body of spaciousness, which is also the body of refined energy and which is also the body luminosity, which is the body of openness, unbound openness.

What is called by some the illusionary body is the body of the intermediate area of experience, the body of potential space, the body of luminosity, the body of light. The luminous body is the body of the awareness field with its intensity and expansion and with its contraction. This body of light has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. In this body of light which is the body of the awareness field the three kayas can begin to manifest and can be felt simultaneously. The body of awareness is the body of continuity, of resonance and of extension. If you practice extension you can bring forth this embodiment of light.

There is the beatific body and this sphere is less organized by mind, less organized by gross sensations, less organized by phantasmagoria, less organized by redundant thinking, less organized by disorganized emotional reaction, less organized by the drivenness of primitive drives, and less organized by the sensation of drivenness and discharge. This body is less organized by trance and dissociative dispersement.

The body is the body of the flesh, as char, luminous flesh. Merleau Ponty was preoccupied with the body as the medium of flesh, the dimension of flesh. In the language of Vajrayana this is the dimension of nirmanakaya.

The body in awareness as awareness field is free from the mind and the mind is within the body of awareness. Suffused by the awareness field the mind becomes the mind of light within the body of light. It is difficult for the mind to become the mind of light unless

the mind is located within the body of the awareness field which is the body of light. If you are in mind alone you will suffer and so will those associated with you. It is very easy for you to become the demon of mind.

The body of light is sensuous but not the gross dense sensuousness of the physical body alone. This is luminous sensuality, luminous flesh.

The human face is the medium of flesh. The face is the openness of primordial awareness, of subjectivity in the medium of the body. The openness, radiance and knowingness come through the face. The face is also facticity, actuality and resonance. Within the face is luminous flesh, luminous clarity. The trace of primordial awareness is within the face. The face is the medium of the body; the face is the vehicle of awareness, the medium of awareness. The face is the trace of awareness within the flesh, char.

The face is absolute singularity, infinitely open even within psychological closedness. The beingness of *Being* manifesting as flesh, within the singularity of iconic flesh. The trace of awareness embodied is centered within the face. The face resists representational conceptualization and is iconic in nature. The face is symbolic in the true sense of the word; symbolic in the sense of the innermost awareness becoming present. The trace is virtual no-thingness, virtual openness, and pure awareness within nirmanakaya. Within the sambhogakaya ritual the Vajrasattva has one face and two arms and is our own appearance as awareness, our own face of awareness. The innermost field is manifesting within the outer field, non-duality manifesting within duality. As the ritual text declares “this is my own appearance.”

Through the face the beingness of *Being* is known, pure awareness is known, luminous non-duality is experienced directly and unmediated. The face is beatificence in humanness, within appearance, immediate and complete. Completely obvious and both concealed and unconcealed simultaneously; timelessness in time.

I will now use more of Merleau Ponty’s language.” This responsiveness of the elemental flesh is pre-personal, that is, the *I* is beholding and beheld within this elemental flesh. This original beholding-ness is pre-logical, and we know the world through the body, the trace manifesting within the face. It is precisely my body which perceives the body of another person and discovers in the other body the world and worlds; my body and the body of the other, the embodiment as vehicle or medium of simultaneousness.”

“My body and the body of the other are one whole and the anonymous existence of which my body is the renewed trace and hence forth inhabits both bodies simultaneously.” Within this description of Merleau Ponty we can hear the intertwining of non-duality within duality.

He continues, “My body as field is the fabric in which all objects are woven. The body or embodiment is a perpetual incarnation. There is a pre-personal time beyond memory

and ego logical time, the time of the past, the present and the future.” Here in his description of pre-personal time we can hear the intimations of timeless awareness.

He continues, “The trace is older than myself. It is an origin before any origin to which we can access. We always inhabit a present that is not totally present to itself. It is the trace of the original past, a past which had never been present and is not yet fulfilled in completeness that can be completed.”

There is an uncanniness of trace; this flesh of awareness belongs to pre-personal time. Pre-personal trace work appears within the face.

He continues, “There is pre-reflective experience and reflection that seeks to know it. There is a pre-personal intentionality that is before any judgment of my mind. There is a deeper intentionality and awareness that is beyond representational thinking, thinking of the mind. There is a world opening characteristic that is beyond the subject object structuring of experience. The primordial opening is erotic.” By erotic Merleau Ponty is speaking to the primordial openness in which there is energy, luminosity and radiance.

Again he continues, “Radical reflection is what takes hold of me as I am in the act of forming and formulating the understanding of subject and object, and brings to light the source of these understandings. We must retrieve, retrouver, as anterior to the understanding of subject and object, or the fact of my subjectivity and the subjectivity of the other, that primordial layer at which both persons and understanding come into being.” Here he is describing the indivisibility at the level of *Being* manifesting within each other.

He then continues “I find *trouve* in my self through reflection, along with the perceiving subject, a pre-personal subject. This redemption or bringing forth of the pre-personal subjectivity, of embodiment bearing the traces of awareness that is involved in the very emergence as subjectivity”. Here we hear the manifestation of primordial awareness manifesting as subjectivity.

He continues, “Others and my embodiment are born together from an original ecstasy. It is within this original ecstasy of non-duality that the traces of self and otherness can be found. There is this original intercorporeality.” This intercorporeality is field like and this pre-personal stage is the dimension of our embodiment as oneness within otherness. Or as the Dakini said to Dudjom Lingpa, “You and I are indivisible.”

This structure of intersubjectivity brings forth the field as the form of intercorporeal being for which the flesh is the elemental medium. This in the language of the *kaya*’s is the *nirmanakaya*.

The experienced self and otherness belong to and participate in this intertwining of the shared medium of the flesh. And here Merleau Ponty continues, “It is not I who sees, nor he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us.” Again, we have

the vision of non-duality within duality. And he continues, “We pass into and through one another....consonance.” In this description he is articulating extension and the capacity to pass through others at the level of the field. This understanding of passing through is understood in Hua-Yen Buddhism as well in Dzogchen.

I will not use Merleau Ponty’s language at this point. In the child’s relation to others Merleau Ponty carries forth Husserl’s account of intersubjectivity. The child who has gnosis enters group life of the human field in a particular time and circumstance. The child relates at the level of bodily gnosis and feeling as pre-reflective knowingness. This is a stage prior to the mirror stage of narcissism. Pre-reflective oneness of non-duality appearing within duality and within the appearing of duality there is non-duality. This knowingness may disappear as the mind formulates and is formulated through representational thinking and affective experience. Gnosis is a penetration into that which was always there and there is awareness which is the world and the universe itself. Awareness enters awareness as awareness, the field enters the field as field, or as is described in the Yeshe Lama, *the inner ying meets the outer ying*.

Again Merleau Ponty continues, “There is an anonymous life preceding my own history. There is this deeper experience of embodiment whose traces he wished to experience. Because I am an embodied being I belong not only to the time of culture and my own mind, but to another time, a time much older than I, that is a time which has its own independent course and unfolding and which my personal life utilizes but does not entirely overlay.”

He continues, “My personal life must be the resumption of a pre-personal tradition. There is therefore another subject beneath me, for whom the world exists before I am here and who marks my place in it. The captive or natural spirit is my body, not the momentary body which is the instrument of my personal choices and which fastens upon this or that world, but a system of anonymous functions, which draw every particular focus into the general unfolding.”

“There is preceding the personal, beneath the person a pre-personal dimension and state of bodily existence an anonymous and generalized existence, a bodily way of being in the world that is not yet structured according to the conditions of subject and object. This primordial level, global, syncretic, bodily felt, is on the horizon of all our perceptions, but it is a horizon of origin that is difficult to reach and difficult to express and thematize. Each of the levels in which we successively live makes particularized only for a previously given level. Each of the whole succession of our experience passes through an already acquired level of spatiality.”

In these statements we hear Merleau Ponty opening the understanding of primordial awareness manifesting in time and space as well as the historical experience of previous incarnations.